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An Estimate of Rostand

THE bare facts of Rostand's life are soon recorded. He was born in Marseilles in 1869, the son of a well known and well-to-do journalis. There and at Paris, whither the family removed, he received an excellent education. As a youth he showed his inlination for the writing of poetry and of plays; his family encouraged him in such work; his financial independence gave him opportunity to prosecute it. His first poetic play, the light and humorous fantasy of "es Romanesques," was acted as the Comedie Francaise in the spring of 1894. A year later Bernhardt produced his version of the mediaeval tale of the troubadour enamored of a princess of Tripoli and dying at sight of her beauty, "La Princesse Lointaine." Next followed in the spring of 1897, and again from Bernhardt's hands, "La Samaritaine," a highly decorated and poetized setting of the meeting of Jesus with the woman of Samaria.

Eight months later Coquelin set on the stage Rostand's masterpiece, "Cyrano de Bergerac," romaintic comedy, rich in pictorial quality, poetic order, ornate diction, vivid characterization, sentimental incident and savory anecdote—a true, romantic drama in verse such as had hardly been written since the days of Hugo. "Cyrano" went around the theatres of the world to almost universal acclaim. Rostand's next play, "L'Aiglon," produced by Bernhardt in 1900 and setting Napoleon's hapless son, the Duke of Reichstadt, in half-poetic, half-realistic scenes, indicated no advance in his powers, and even hinted at a thinning of them. For ten years thereafter he wrote little but fugitive verse, until he emerged in 1910 from the halo of retirement in which he had lived with "Chantecler," a fable in poetic and dramatic form and voice that would turn the animals and the birds of the barnyard into symbolic figures. It did not lack fantasy or poetic exuberance, but elaborate machinery and over-expectation hampered the piece and it gained no such vogue as its predecessors. Disappointed, perhaps, or as some believe, run dry, Rostand returned to his retirement at his villa in the Pyrenees and wrote still less. One or two short plays that seemed stiff and cold beside his earlier pieces, and occasional poems of warmer and more flowing voice, complete the sum of his work. At his death he was distinctly a poet-playwright glamoured by the glories of a recent past around a sterile present. Out of those glories, however, he had harvested fortune, a world-wide reputation, and every literary and theatrical honor that the French could bestow.

When Rostand, as the playwright of "Cyrano," "L'Aiglon," and "Chantecler," was at the height of his fame, his close friend, Henry Barbusse, more recently known as the author of the war book, "Le Feu," wrote this intimate sketch of him: "Rostand is primarily a simple, unaffected, and modest man, and he detests publicity. We are confronted with a man who has done nothing, except writing plays, to cause the gossip which centers around his name in Paris, in France, throughout the world. He has always, for example, disliked the excitement caused by the many postponements of 'Chantecler.'

"'It is a mere poetical fancy, nothing else,' he would repeat to his friends, 'and people are beginning to expect something quite different—something extraordinary, supernatural. It is a hopeless situation.' And he was almost inclined to compare that exaggerated overflow of curiosity to the rising of the Seine waters in the recent Paris flood.

"Rostand, moreover, for a long time has been in the habit of leading for the greater part of the year a retired life on his estate at Cambo, in the Pyrenees, and this more than anything else shows that the poet's temperament is tranquil and simple. Rostand adores the country, and gardens, above all. I have never found him so talkative, so enthusiastic, as when we have chatted together on the 'art of making gardens.'"

Even in his own time Rostand had seen his reputation decline from the pinnacle to which "Cyrano de Bergerac" had raised it. In the beginnings with "Les Romantiques," "La Princesse Lointaine," and "La Samaritaine," it rested, first, upon the supple freedom, the delicate workmanship, and the poetic imagery of his verse, upon the glamour of romantic fantasy that he wove about his pieces, upon a grace of mood and a fineness of feeling and sentiment. "Cyrano," however, was far robuster work. The verse gained new energy, passed from freedom into a very flood of word and image. The personages gained ampler and more human traits; emotion beat high; humor ran rich and full; the pictorial scenes throbbed with life and color. From romaintic fantasy Rostand passed to romaintic power. In "L'Aiglon" he sought seemingly to mingle the two veins—that of the robust Cyrano in the figure of the Napoleonic grenadier, that of the earlier pieces in the delicately-drawn figure of the emperor's son. But already Rostand was giving sign of waning powers. In "Chantecler" the old exuberance of word and image still flowed vigorously; there were patches of the high humor and the high passion of "Cyrano," but the framework of the play was artificial; the progress labored; the fantasy wilted. Thereafter Rostand was a chided and stiffened spirit."—Boston Transcript.

RECONSTRUCTION PROBLEMS IN CLOTHES

New York, December 30.

WITH the reconstruction of devastated Europe comes the reconstruction of last year's gown. Of course we will be allotted more finery now that the war is over, but the feminine world discards, to a certain extent, this privilege and decides that it is far more fashionable to be doing reconstruction work. Whether it is a gown or a village of beautiful France my lady is intensely interested.

The "reconstruction" of a gown is in reality quite simple. If the lines of the frock are good, some little added touch, like a collar and cuff set or some unique way of draping the skirt, will give an entire new and fresh look to the dress.

Lace, the beautiful. There is always something about this filmy texture that bewitches even the most cautious of women. There is just a myriad of various little things lying about the shops, and each individual taste may be satisfied. Vests of filet lace, to be worn with velvet dresses, are at present very smart. In some cases there is a collar and cuff to match the vest, but one must be very careful not to overdo with an abundance of lace. Just enough looks refined, but too much is inclined to look cheap, even though the lace be of the most expensive quality.

Many dainty boudoir caps are developed from this network of design, and those that are particularly pretty are those fashioned after the style of Marie Antoinette. With this period one usually associates the most feminine modes of the history of dress. And as lace is one of the most feminine trimmings, it follows that developed after the Marie Antoinette style they are just glorious delights.

One of the shops is showing an attractive selection of boudoir gowns, the inspiration for which was found in the Italian period of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. These show batiked velvets, chiffons and brocades all in colorings typical of that period. For the woman of slender grace these models are shown. For, indeed, it is quite out of the question for one of awkward stature to adopt any of the period costumes.

Big, comfy, fleecy bathrobes are now on sale in most of the shops. But there are patterns, too, that one may get and with the assistance of a big blanket, one would be well protected against the cold of frosty nights.

The most necessary thing in life, especially to the business woman is the separate skirt. Always these stand-bys are smart looking and so practical. One has the side pleats and the buttoned-over flap as a feature, and the charming blouse worn with it makes the whole a stunning costume. Another frock has a dainty little yoke of net and puffed sleeves of net to correspond. The skirt is long and rather narrow and the buttons down the side tend to emphasize this line.

"THE CALL"

By C. Fox Smith.

HERE'S an office back in London, and the dusty sunlight falls
With its swarms of dancing motes across the floor,
On the piles of books and papers and the drab distempered walls
And the bowlers on their pegs behind the door.
There's an office stool on London where a fellow used to sit
(But the chap that used to sit there's oversea);
There's a job they're keeping open till that fellow's done his bit,
And the one that job is waiting for is—Me!

And it may be black ingratitude, but, oh, Good Lord, I know
I could never stick to office life again,
With the coats and cuffs and collars and the long hours crawling slow
And the quick lunch and the same old morning train;
I have looked on Life and Death and seen the naked soul of man.
And the heart of things is other than it seemed,
And the world is somehow larger than the good old office plan,
And the ways of earth are wider than I dreamed.

There's a chap in the Canadians—a clinking good chap, too—
And he hails from back o' nowhere in B. C.,
And he says it's sure some country, and I wonder if it's true,
And I rather fancy that's the place for me.
There's a trail I mean to follow and a camp I mean to share
Out beyond the survey, up in Cassiar,
For there's something weakened in me that I never knew was there,
And they'll have to find some other chap to fill that vacant chair
When the boys come marching homeward from the war.

—London Punch.

"We don't understand some of the things you said in that speech of yours," said the constituent. "Then," replied Senator Sorghum gently, "you should not find fault with me. What you do not thoroughly understand you cannot intelligently disapprove of."—Washington Star.